GENERATION EUROPE
The Academy

SHARING 4 CARING

How to support wellbeing of young participants and youth leaders

Booklet 3

Imprint

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''*For me the best way to believe in a good future is to build it, support others to do it and empower it. I love observing and strategic planning, because it sets free* **a hundred of ideas to act.**''

(Franzi Eckl, IBB e.V., Germany)

INTRODUCTION

Who are we?

We are the Competence Group Methods, a group of professionals working in the field of international youth work and part of the network Generation Europe – The Academy.

This booklet is addressed to all those who accompany and support young people in their development. Youth leaders, so to speak, who work with groups of children and young people on a daily basis, whether in the formal or informal sector.

At the beginning of 2022, we wanted to develop this brochure to help groups of young people to cope with the difficult consequences of the Covid pandemic, which at that time had been going on for almost two years. Since March 2022, we felt it is imperative to include the topic of war and its impact on the mental health and development of children and young people. The decisive factor was the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

But in many other places in the world, too, there are constant wars that affect the quality of life of children and young people.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one in seven (14 %) ten to 19-year-olds worldwide suffers from mental illness, but it remains largely undiagnosed and untreated.

Young people with mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination, stigma (affecting readiness to seek help), educational difficulties, risk-taking behaviours, physical sickness and human rights violations. Multiple factors affect mental health. The more risk factors young people are exposed to, the greater the potential impact on their mental health.

A higher risk of mental illness is due to living conditions, stigma, discrimination, exclusion and lack of access to quality support and services. This includes people living

in precarious conditions, those with chronic illness, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability or other neurological disorder, pregnant adolescents, teenage parents or those who have been married early or forcibly, orphans and young people from ethnic or sexual minorities, and other discriminated groups. Therefore, protective and supportive environments in the family, at school and in the wider community are important. Especially in cases of risk-factors, the intervention of youth workers is essential to promote well-being and to recognize signals of uneasiness.

Adolescence is a crucial phase for the development of social and emotional habits that are important for mental well-being. These include healthy sleeping patterns, regular exercise, developing coping, problem-solving and interpersonal skills as well as learning how to manage emotions.

Emotional, social and life skills are fundamental tools for young people to cope with the demands and changes of daily life. That is the ability to form interpersonal relationships and take responsibility in the context of their social role, make decisions and resolve conflicts. For young people facing a mental health problem, these skills may be impaired or deficient.

In this context, youth leaders guide and support young people in their personal, social and educational development by encouraging them to take a leading role in their own lives and health journey to help them overcome developmental blocks and regain their potential.

We live in uncertain times and are often guided by our feelings and fears, but this is exactly what should not play a role in our work with children and young people. In our work with the groups, it is essential that we have an objective and, as far as possible, neutral view of our participants and that we always make ourselves aware of it. Mindfulness and attentiveness are the order of the day, for ourselves and for our participants. In order for this to succeed, we would like to use this booklet to offer you support and encouragement, to give you courage and encourage you all not to give up. And we are not alone. There are experts who can and must take over at a certain point, be aware of this and make use of their expert offers.

What resources do we as professionals draw on? What can we do to be well? How can we pass on mental health strategies? In this booklet we will try to provide some tools to answer these questions.

STAGES OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

	EARLY 10–15 YEARS	MIDDLE 14–17 YEARS	LATE 16–19 YEARS
Growth of body	• Secondary sexual characteristics appear • Rapid growth reaches a peak	• Secondary sexual characteristics advance • Growth slows down • Has reached approximately 95% of adult growth	• Physically mature
Growth of brain (Prefrontal cortex)		• Brain growth occurs • Influence on social and problem solving skills	
Cognition (ability to get knowledge through different ways of thinking)	• Uses concrete thinking ("here and now") • Does not understand how a present action has result in the future	• Thinking can be more abstract (theoretical) but goes back to concrete thinking under stress • Better understands results of own actions • Very self-absorbed	• Most thinking is now abstract • Plans for the future • Understands how choices and decisions now have an affect on the future
Psychological and social	• Spends time thinking about rapid physical growth and body image (how others see them) • Frequent changes in mood	• Creates their body image • Thinks a lot about impractical or impossible dreams • Feels very powerful • Experiments with sex, drugs, risks	• Plans and follows long term goals • Usually comfortable with own body image • Understands right from wrong (morally and ethically)
Family	• Struggles with rules about independence/dependence • Argues and is disobedient	• Argues with people in authority	• Moving from a child–parent/guardian relationship to a more equal adult-adult relationship
Peer group	• Important for their development • Intense same sex friendships • Contact with opposite sex in groups	• Strong peer friendships • Peer group most important and determines behaviour	• Decisions/values less influenced by peers in favour of individual friendships • Selection of partner based on individual choice rather than what others think
Sexuality	• Self-exploration and evaluation	• Forms stable relationships	• Mutual and balanced sexual relations

Figure 1: Participants manual: IMAI one-day or orientation on adolescents living with HIV (World Health Organization, 2010).
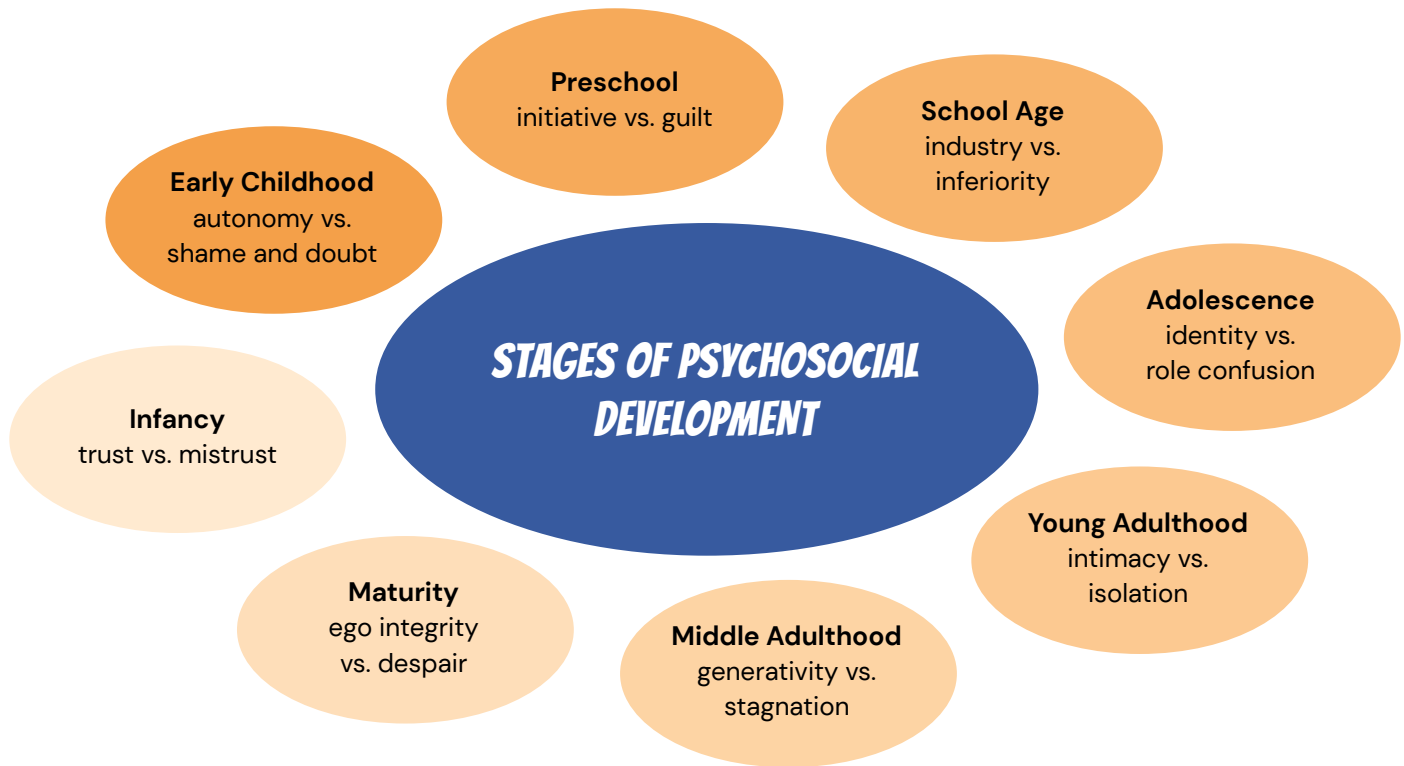
Figure 2: Overview of Erikson's Stages of Development (Erikson, 1993).

1. DEFINITION OVERVIEW

1.1 Adolescence phases

Adolescence is the time in a young person's life when they transition from childhood into young adulthood and experience physical, behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and social developmental changes. Each stage is characterised by transitional steps that every young person experiences. It is important to recognize what these steps are and to distinguish them from symptoms of deviance. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), adolescence is divided in 3 stages: early (10–15 years), middle (14–17 years) and late (16–19 years).

1.2 What is mental health?

The WHO constitution states that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1946). As is now well known, promoting mental health as an essential component of health does not mean eliminating disorders or disabilities, but requires a broader perspec-tive that considers needs, goals and personal realisation. Mental health enables people to build good relationships with both themselves and others, including the ability to feel like a productive and meaningful part of the community. WHO states that this condition must involve the ability to "think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life" (WHO, 2021a).

1.3 What is emotional regulation?

Emotional regulation can be described as the way in which a person sustains, strengthens or hinders their emotions according to their intentions or goals (De Berardis et al., 2020). If this inner system is severely impaired, emotions can hardly be tolerated, and particularly intense and unpleasant emotions can lead the affected person to try to regulate them through external stimuli on their own body, e.g. through drug use and abuse, addictive behaviour and impulsive or risky behaviour. These actions do indeed have the temporary and illusory ability to alter mood and provide apparent

shortcuts in dealing with relationships and social life. Unfortunately, what really happens is a reinforcement of maladaptive behaviours and a consequent reinforcement of emotional dysregulation as well (De Berardis et al., 2020). The current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013) shows that more than 75 percent of psychological disorders are related to emotion regulation.

1.4 Mental health disorders

Mental health disorders can be distinguished in the following categories:

▶ Emotional disorders
▶ Behavioural disorders
▶ Eating disorders
▶ Psychosis
▶ Suicide and self-harm
▶ Risk-taking behaviour

Emotional disorders are common among adolescents. Anxiety disorders (which may involve panic or excessive worry) are the most prevalent in this age group and are more common among older than among younger adolescents. Depression and anxiety share some of the same symptoms, including rapid and unexpected changes in mood.

Anxiety and depressive disorders can profoundly affect school attendance and schoolwork. Social withdrawal can exacerbate isolation and loneliness. Depression can lead to suicide.

Behavioural disorders are more common among younger adolescents than older adolescents. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterised by a difficulty paying attention, excessive activity and acting without regard to consequences. Behavioural disorders can affect adolescents' education and even result in deviant behaviour.

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, commonly emerge during adolescence and young adulthood. Eating disorders involve abnormal eating behaviour and preoccupation with food, often accompanied by concerns about body weight and shape.

Anorexia nervosa can lead to premature death, often due to medical complications or suicide and even has a higher mortality rate than any other mental disorder.

Psychosis usually occurs in late adolescence or early adulthood. Symptoms can include hallucinations or delusions. These experiences can impair an adolescent's ability to participate in daily life or education and often lead to stigma or human rights violations.

Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death of older adolescents from 15 to 19 years (WHO, 2021). Risk factors for suicide are multiple and include harmful alcohol use, childhood abuse, stigmatisation of those seeking help, barriers to accessing medical care and free access to suicide resources. Digital media, like any other media, can play a significant role in either enhancing or weakening suicide prevention efforts.

Many **risk-taking behaviours** for health such as substance use or sexual risk-taking start during adolescence. Risk-taking behaviours can be an unhelpful strategy to cope with emotional difficulties and can severely impact an adolescent's mental and physical well-being. The use of tobacco and cannabis are additional concerns. Perpetration of violence is a risk-taking behaviour that can increase the likelihood of low educational attainment, injury, involvement with crime or death. According to the Global Health Estimates, interpersonal violence was ranked among the leading causes of death of older adolescent boys in 2019 (WHO, 2021).

1.5 How the pandemic has influenced youth mental health

"The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of people's lives in an unprecedented manner" (OECD, 2020, p.2) - or still does? During the lockdown, people had to isolate themselves from others. Daily lives changed from one day to another, while illness and death have become more present as topics in everyday life. Individual experiences with COVID-19 vary widely, just like whether or not people belong to an at-risk group or have lost loved ones.

The housing situation also influences whether people have a lot of room and access to private space at home or not. Private space and a positive family climate as well as social support had a supportive influence on mental health during the pandemic. In contrast, socially disadvantaged children and children of mentally distressed parents were particularly at risk of mental health problems (Ravens-Sieberer, Kaman & Erhart, 2021). For young people and especially for vulnerable youth it shows that "the COVID-19 crisis poses considerable risks in the fields of education, employment, mental health and disposable income" (OECD, 2020, p.2).

In general, it is observed that mental health problems, anxiety, eating disorders, depression and diabetes increased during the pandemic. These mental health problems increased from the first wave in 2020, according to the German COPSY study on quality of life and mental health in children and adolescents during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ravens-Sieberer, Kaman & Erhart, 2021).

According to a WHO study on Mental Health and COVID-19 (WHO, 2022), a significant increase in mental health problems was found in the general population in the first year of the pandemic. Further research on mental health and COVID-19 among specific at-risk populations and in low- and middle-income countries is needed. Data on suicide mortality are mixed and do not clearly indicate a change in rates since the pandemic. However, data indicate a higher risk of suicidal behaviour among young people, especially in the case of a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, or loneliness, as well as exhaustion among healthcare workers (WHO, 2022, p.4).

It is important to take good care of yourself in order to be able to take care of others, and this also applies to youth leaders. If we want to promote young people's mental health, we should start with ourselves.

Conflict and instability strikes again...

The pandemic has already tested almost everyone's resilience to cope with the changed norms of daily life. Additional stressors are clearly not helpful in creating psychological stability, and the ways in which people cope with these challenges include both legal and illegal

substances that can be overused and abused. Stimulus overload in a war only adds to the potential imbalance in which we as humans have to absorb, filter, sort and manage these stimuli at the rate at which they occur.

The war at the gates of Europe has caused a series of waves of fear, but also a demonstration of solidarity. This is not a new reality for young people and children living in Europe, as there have already been other wars in the last decade and various people have sought refuge in Europe. However, the constant presence in the media and the visibility of the problem affect the way young people are able to mentally integrate them into reality.

It is important to be sensitive and aware of the conse-quences that war can have on those who suffer directly and indirectly. There must be a call for the deconstruc-tion of labels and for the refugee status to only be a short process in a period of someone's life.

The war also raises other issues that impact many of the ways communities integrate someone from outside. War can lead to discourses on conflict and violence, which today are underpinned by the illusion that human beings define themselves exclusively or primarily through a single identity/perspective. As if the world consisted of a federation of religions or cultures or civilisations, ignoring the importance of aspects such as gender, profession, language, science, politics. Each case is unique and the topic of war should be treated with great awareness of personal experiences and individual needs.

The work of a youth leader must emphasise the need for a clear understanding of the human capacity for empathy, encourage critical thinking and promote a constructive perspective in the local youth community against stereotyping or diminishing the capacities of young people who have lived in contexts of war.

Young people, including those with flight experience due to war, conflicts and economic crises, are first and foremost young people. Whether a flight has an impact on mental health depends on various factors. In order for young people to feel a sense of belonging and to develop further, it is important not to reduce them to their flight experience.

2. HOW TO IDENTIFY A PROBLEM?

Given the complexity that constitutes mental health, we must start from the variability of mental suffering in terms of entity and subjectivity. The DSM-5 (APA, 2013) – the latest version of the most famous diagnostic manual for mental illness – strongly emphasises the importance of viewing mental illness as a heterogeneous condition that has a very different spectrum of manifestations, intensity and timing. To determine whether someone is suffering from a mental illness, we cannot solely rely on the presence of certain symptoms or behaviours that indicate a diagnosis. Subjective perceptions of psychological pain and/or hopelessness, feedback from the social environment (family, work/school, community) about the degree of impairment of functioning within social relationships, as well as one's cultural and gender background, are all factors that, in an almost infinite number of possible combinations, influence the presence and extent of a mental illness, its significance, its consequences, its severity and its prognosis, and must all be taken into account (APA, 2013).

Behavioural and emotional developmental disorders are strongly influenced by the family and the socio-educational environment to which a young person belongs. It is within these relational contexts that the disorder shows its meaning, expresses itself and can be recognised. Therefore, it is very important to collect information not only from the individual relationship with the young person, but also from different related contexts.

A general health assessment may make it possible to identify risk factors such as malnutrition, abuse and/or neglect, common illnesses, chronic diseases. A discussion with parents or caregivers may indicate difficulties on the part of the youth in associating with peers or in controlling his or her aggressiveness, which may manifest itself in outbursts of anger, attitudes of being too active or too lonely, perhaps refusing to engage in regular activities or going to school. A teacher may observe a marked tendency in the young person to be easily distracted, disruptive, involved in problems, unable to

complete schoolwork. A youth worker may point to the young person's attitude of breaking rules/laws or being physically aggressive towards others.

Behavioural problems in adolescence manifest themselves mainly in the difficulty of being in relationships with others, both peers and adults, in an appropriate and satisfactory way.

2.1 The importance of recognising symptoms

Recognising risk factors and symptoms can lead to early intervention, which in most cases can prevent the onset of the disease. Working with the young person to contain or eliminate risk factors can be a tremendous help. It is important that youth leaders recognise their role as a caregiver who can point out the best way to support the struggling young person. As mentioned earlier, in most cases the young person suffering from emotional problems lives in risky conditions, suffers from stigma, discrimination or exclusion, or does not have access to quality support and services. So the

youth worker might be the only person who can support the young person to recognise the problem and refer them to the right support system. Failure to recognise the symptoms could otherwise expose the young person to even more risk factors and increase the likelihood that they will develop a mental disorder and be excluded from social life.

2.2 How to talk about it?

When it comes to young people, the first thing to consider is their age. If you are working with minors, it is important to follow national youth protection laws. In most cases, permission signed by the parent/guardian is required if you want to talk to the minor about their health. Involving the parents/guardians is not only necessary for legal reasons, but also to promote intervention and encourage a change in the risk situation. This applies to minors as well as to young people living at home; it is recommended to involve families/guardians as much as possible. For young people over the age of 18, the young person's permission is of course required to share your concerns with the family.

Observing the circumstances and the relationship with the family is also very important. You might have to enter high-risk circumstances as a youth leader. What can you do if a family is abusive? The first advice is to try and remember your position and what your role is in the young person's life. As a youth leader, you can ask for the appropriate support, e.g. from a hotline or counselling service for social workers. In the appendix of this booklet, you will find some suggestions on support systems available at European level. Try to find local contacts and keep a list of phone numbers ready to contact yourself or to share with the young person in need.

If you want to talk to a young person or their family about such a sensitive issue, the most important thing is to make an appointment and allow enough time and space for the conversation. Do not approach the young person at the end of an activity or the parents/guardians when they pick them up, as you may have other commitments later. When inviting them, express the need to talk about an important matter concerning their child without giving too many details. If questions arise, you can always reply that you will answer them during the meeting. Set an end time and state it in the invitation. It is recommended not to stay longer than 1.30 hours, which is enough to talk about the problem and make an action plan. If necessary, you can make a second appointment, but it is important for your health not to spend too much time in one session. Letting the feelings of others overwhelm you is not healthy and does not help the sufferer.

Asking questions is often more important than suggesting solutions. For example, asking parents/guardians about a child's sleep routine will already alert them to the need for a sleep routine.

By starting the conversation with questions, you give your counterpart the feeling that you are there to find out about their status and not to judge and evaluate them. Simple questions like "How are you?", "How are things going in your job?", "How do you feel about your classmates?" help you to better understand the environment of the young person you want to help and make the meeting run smoothly. Try to create a trusting atmosphere, often emphasise that you are there to help, not to judge, and only share your concerns when you feel the person or their family is ready. When meeting with parents, ask if they noticed the same thing or had similar thoughts and worries.

3. YOUTH WORKERS HAVE TO FEEL SAFE TOO

It is not only our young participants who are currently experiencing uncertain, even frightening times. We as adults, who accompany and support the young people are also exposed to the same circumstances and have to take care of ourselves and our mental health, in particular if we want to master our task well and responsibly. In the following, we have collected coping strategies from our network and would like to share them with you. The most important tip, however, is to observe yourself closely and take yourself seriously.

We should not repress our own feelings and instead seek support whenever we need it. Sharing negative feelings is not a flaw and does not have to be shameful, we are not weak at such a moment but responsible. Peer counselling can be a tremendous support, as can a jour fixe with colleagues in a larger group. If it does not already exist, it should definitely be set up. Ideally, one does not lead a youth group alone and can therefore support or substitute for each other in any case.

"Never go alone."

The strategies collected from our network are divided in two parts: **strategies for teamwork and coping strategies for personal well–being**.

FOR PERSONAL WELL-BEING

Find a clear reason: "Why I am doing this at this stage of the project?"

Give the question to the group: What can we do? What do you (as a group or person) need?

Create a break if needed.

Be honest.

Reflect afterwards: Was there someone who I didn't see today?

Take a deep breath before you react in challenging situations.

Diving pearls: What is the strength behind the attitude that is getting on my nerves? Decide to deal with the strength.

Take responsibility and create it.

Don't take everything personally immediately.

Wipe the board blank again and again.

Remember what drives you on and gives you personal motivation!

Balls Park: Whatever might distract you from your actual task, write it on a piece of paper, crumple the paper into a ball and park the balls for the time of the meeting. Don't forget to pick them up again at the end and take care of them.

Figure 3: Coping strategies

FOR GOOD TEAMWORK

Have a clear and honest conversation with the team if something goes wrong.

Give and receive positive feedbacks.

Remember what drives you on and gives you personal motivation!

Keep a balance between what you get/learn and what you give/share.

Take a break if needed.

Be honest.

Break large tasks into smaller ones to tick off. (The ticking of small tasks is motivating).

Simple things that make happy: Having a good time together with the team, dreaming, planning…

Good and trustful connection with the team, honest exchange.

Exchange with your collegues for reflection and feedback.

FOR COOPERATION WITH A GROUP

Stay in contact with the participants. During informal phases, try to spend some time with the participants. It helps to create a respectful win–win enviroment.

Remember what drives you on and gives you personal motivation!

Be honest.

The participants are the experts regarding what they need and what they want.

Create a good atmospheere in the room – be a host.

Give the question to the group: What can we do? What do you (as a group or person) need?

Ask instead of comment.

Give positive feedbacks and motivate the participants to do the same.

Visualise the results of work as a motivation for the group and for yourself.

Make decisions demo-cratically together with the group. Clarify beforehand what can be voted on.

FOR YOUR WELL-BEING AS A FACILITATOR IN A GROUP

Find a clear reason: "Why I am doing this at this stage of the project?"

Give the question to the group: What can we do? What do you (as a group or person) need?

Create a break if needed.

Don't take everything personally immediately.

Reflect afterwards: Was there someone who I didn't see today?

Take a deep breath before you react in challenging situations.

Take responsibility and create it.

Remember what drives you on and gives you personal motivation.

Diving pearls: What is the strength behind the attitude that is getting on my nerves? Decide to deal with the strength.

Be honest.

Balls Park: Whatever might distract you from your actual task, write it on a piece of paper, crumple the paper into a ball and park the balls for the time of the meeting. Don't forget to pick them up again at the end and take care of them.

When it comes to teamwork, there are some things that should be self-evident to make it work. The most important points include good and honest communication and feedback. Also mentioned was the possibility of dividing larger tasks into smaller ones so that they are easier to manage. If necessary, take a break. It is also important to remember what drives you to keep yourself motivated and to allow the team to have a good time together, also with a lot of reflection and positive feedback. It is also good to keep a balance between what you give and what you get in terms of knowledge. If you give what you have, the knowledge will most likely come back to you in a more refined form later.

When it comes to personal well-being, it might be a bit more individual. But to generalise a little, try to start your working day in a gentle way. Switch off the stressful morning to have a little time to yourself and to do something you enjoy. Put on a nice playlist of music, and of course make sure you get a good night's sleep, because you will need it.

As for the team, it is also important for yourself to remember what makes your clock tick and not to lose sight of your goal, because that is where your motivation lies. Prepare well and be full of energy before each work performance.

4. METHODS

How to reduce stress?

Practices (awareness, support, emotional accompany)

These techniques intend to assist and give impulses on how to reduce stress and to improve wellbeing. They do not replace therapy or solve difficult health/mental problems. They can contribute preventively to wellbeing and help to reduce stress. It is recommended for you to try out the exercises beforehand. A special skill in youth work can be the youth leader's examination of their own behaviour to reduce stress and taking on a role model function through stress-reducing behaviour. It can be helpful to reflect with a trusted colleague or have a jour fixe with colleagues to create space for reflection in this regard.

We also present methods that originate from other fields of knowledge, such as spiritual, religious or cultural, and acknowledge the specificities that these fields of knowledge and human experiences have produced over the centuries and which, according to some recent studies, have been shown to have a positive impact on the development of an emotional and mental well-being. The booklet does not aim to promote ideologies. We present these methods because they have positive effects on well-being.

Simple note: Working with nature can improve concentration, promote relaxation and increase self-esteem. If there is an opportunity, use the natural environment and feel if the group or person is emotionally and mentally ready to leave their comfort zone. It is important to choose the right method, but also the place where it will be implemented.

I Methods to relax

Methods to relax can be used when an individual is stressed or to calm down and give support within a group. These methods help to reduce physical symptoms of stress at that moment. They can also be used for mild nervousness or help falling asleep. However, they do not solve difficult mental problems.

The methods have a preventive effect, which is very good. It can be a good idea to introduce the methods to the group step by step and to introduce rituals for relaxation, for example in the evening or at the end of the activities during an encounter. We think it is important to give the participants space to decide whether they want to share their feelings or not. In order for the relaxation to last, it can be helpful to let the participants take their good feelings with them instead of following up with a debriefing. It helps to have a calmer and clearer mind, which promotes positive thinking, concentration, memory and decision-making. Relaxation slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure and relieves tension.

II Methods to reflect

Sometimes in a difficult situation everything seems hopeless. But when thoughts are positively influenced, it is possible to think in a more solution-oriented way. Furthermore, positive thoughts stimulate endorphins and promote health. Methods are presented to reflect in difficult situations, to have hope and to look positively into the future. The methods help to reflect individually or in a group, to support and empower each other.

III Methods to connect

In difficult situations it can be helpful to use the power of the group. A group can be supportive and empowering. If everyone feels welcome, there is a sense of trust and there is an awareness of individual needs. To make everyone feel safe in the group, it is important to create opportunities for everyone to interact in a sensitive way. These methods offer the possibility to strengthen the group cohesion in different ways. When conducting a group method, it can be helpful to pay attention to how long a group has known each other. Sharing thoughts can bring the group together. But thoughts can also be very sensitive. Sometimes it is also good to just end an activity in silence.

Here are a few examples

I   Methods to relax

▶ Belly breathing
▶ Dancing together – Reset

II   Methods to reflect

▶ Three good things
▶ My beloved place
▶ 101 Uses for...

III   Methods to get connected with other people

▶ Creative Core

BELLY BREATHING

Type of method	Relaxation, breathing exercise
Number of participants	Individual, one to one or in a small group up to 15 people
Related competences	Self–awareness
Objectives	Reduce stress and anxiety, to calm down
Time / Duration	10 to 20 minutes
Equipment requirements materials	A quiet space with a chair to sit or possibility to sit on the ground

Description of the activity

It is important to do the activity together with the person or group. The breathing exercise can be guided like this:

1 Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.

2 Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest.

3 Allow your belly to relax, without forcing it.

4 Breath slowly through your nose. The air should move into your nose, so that you feel your stomach rise with your other hand and fall inward (towards your spine). Breath in your own time.

5 Exhale slowly through your mouth. Take note of the hand on your chest, which should remain relatively still.

6 Repeat three to five times, or more if needed.

Debriefing

• How did you feel before the exercise?
• How do you feel now?
• What changes have you observed in your body?

Recommended alternative: End the activity in silence. The relaxation can continue and the participants can take a good feeling with them.

Remarks / technical settings

The breathing exercise helps to relax. The exercise also helps to show preventively how it is possible to relax. According to The American Institute of Stress, 20 to 30 minutes of daily "belly breathing" (abdominal breathing) can reduce stress and anxiety.

More to read:
www.verywellmind.com/abdominal-breathing-2584115

Attention: Everybody reacts differently. It is important that participants breathe at their own pace and can stop the exercise at any time. If there are signs of increasing anxiety attacks or nervousness, special help must be called in.

BELLY BREATHING IN SIX EASY STEPS
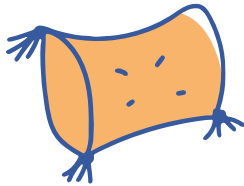
1. Sit in a comfortable position.

2. Close your eyes or lock eyes on one spot.

3. Inhale through the nose while counting to five (belly goes up).

4. Imagine inflating a balloon in your belly.

5. Exhale through the mouth while counting to five (belly comes down).

6. Repeat it three to five times, or more as needed.

Figure 4: Belly breathing

DANCING TOGETHER - RESET

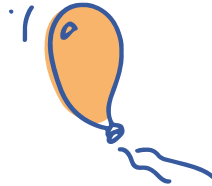| Type of method	Relaxing, refreshing of the own energy level, personal reset
Author	Marion Gronstedt within the framework of Generation Europe – The Academy
Number of participants	One person or more, no upper limit
Related competences	Self-care and self-awareness
Objectives	Getting a group into a good mood for concentrated work in a very personal way and with a common end
Time / Duration	At least 15 minutes
Space requirements	Room which is big enough
Materials	Mobile phones, music, headphones

Description of the activity

Allow your participants to listen to self-selected music on their mobile phones while using headphones.

Dance together in one room, but with their individual style of music. Tell them before they start, that after finishing their personal dance, they should stop the music, take out their →

headphones and lay down on the floor with their eyes closed – all in silence and without chatting.

You can tell them to watch their breath while waiting until everyone has finished their personal dance and arrived on the floor. Then explain the following steps:

Follow your body and breath: Everyone lies down on the floor and just breathes in and out, deep into the abdomen, trying to completely let go and relax in a kind of body scan.

When the impulse to move comes, allow it and follow with your whole body. For example, when your right arm stretches upwards and then sinks to the side, follow gravity and turn your whole body with it. Continue in your own time and feeling.

Take your time! Maybe it helps to do each movement in slow motion. Remind them: They should have their eyes closed and should concentrate on themselves. The aim is for everyone to be relaxed at the end. For young people it is helpful to say that the goal is to be the last one standing again, so that they really take their time.

The activity ends when everybody is standing. Open your eyes, if possible, all together at the same time.

Debriefing

How did you feel during the activity? Was there a change in your feelings during the different parts? Could you concentrate on your own? How do you feel now?

THREE GOOD THINGS

Type of method	An individual method for positive thoughts
Author	Kristin Langer within the framework of Generation Europe – The Academy (Adapted from: Spenst, 2016)
Number of participants	Individual
Related competences	Self-reflection, empathy
Objectives	Self-care, reflection, empowerment
Time / Duration	10 minutes per day
Materials	Paper, a notebook

Description of the activity

1. Close your eyes for a while and look back on your day.
2. Think about things that happened and things you did today.
3. Write them down or exchange thoughts with a close friend.

Debriefing questions

- What went well today?
- Did I do something good for someone today?
- I am grateful for…

Remarks

- A daily routine, for example before going to bed, can help to integrate the method into everyday life.

- The method can then also have a positive influence on sleep.

MY BELOVED PLACE

Type of method	Reflection, self-reflection, relaxation
Author	Kristin (GER) and Inês (PT) within the framework of Generation Europe – The Academy
Number of participants	3 – 20 people
Related competences	Self-reflection, active listening, promoting creativity, stimulating active participation
Objectives	• Promote the ability to self-focus, abstract from external stimulus and process internal information • Develop creative capacity to deconstruct the relationship with space and emotions • Create a space to cultivate empathy and opportunity to listen to each other • Recognize your own emotions, mental settings and limits
Time / Duration	90 minutes
Space requirements	Quiet and enough space to offer sort of personal space to each participant
Materials	Paper, colour pencils, paint, speaker for playing relaxing music

Description of the activity

- Explain that you will do a method to reflect and relax.
- Explain briefly that this activity is to explore inner landscapes. Each person will do a small mental journey.
- Choose some relaxing background music and darken the room a little.
- Bodyscan from the foot to the head: Give time for the participants to slowly connect with their own bodies, to breathe slowly and keep the eyes closed. Each body section must have some seconds to relax the muscles and release body tensions – e.g.: Head – "Relax your eyes, mouth, lips, nose…" Three seconds of silence between each body part.
- Invite them to stand up and sit down again (very slowly).

"Now we are in a new space. Imagine your personal beloved/ safe place."

Ask them to describe it — the more details the better.

- How does this place smell?
- How does it feel?
- How does it taste?
- How does it look?

When they are stressed out, tell them to close their eyes and spend a few minutes imagining that scene. Give time so that people can open their eyes again. →

- Have paper and pens onsite for drawing.

- Tell them to write down a description and/or draw their place. It could be a cabin in the woods, a sandy beach, or even their backyard.

- Then ask them to introduce the place, OR

- decide not to let the participants share it and have them just take the good feeling of the place into the day, OR

- form a symbol of the place with your body and keep it in your thoughts with you.

- Tell participants: Enjoy the result of the method. You can either take the picture with you and/or hold on to the feeling you have created.

Debriefing

- For debriefing, turn the music down or off. Introduce the moment of sharing and reflect on the creative process.

- How was it to imagine the place?

- What kind of aspects/ingredients are needed to create your beloved place?

- What does happiness mean for you?

- Which kind of ingredients could you include in your daily life?

Remarks

- Use the method at the end of the day or after an activity to calm down.

- A "beloved place" can help the brain to take a vacation from whatever stress it is experiencing.

Annex

Music example: Ravi & Anoushka Shankar (YouTube)

101 USES FOR...

Type of method	Creative writing, reflection, unblock reflection, problem-solving
Author	Geraghty, Margret: The Five-Minute Writer: Exercise and inspiration in creative writing in five minutes a day (2009), p. 13 – Used by Inês in the YouthCoop context
Number of participants	From 3 to 300 people
Related competences	Mental flexibility, creativity, lateral thinking
Objectives	Unblock mentally, increase the ability to deconstruct a topic or concept
Time / Duration	20 – 40 minutes
Space requirements	Enough to set the group in a circle, seated on the floor or in chairs.
Materials	Pencils, paper, speaker for music, a list of random topics (not too much) to cut in pieces

Description of the activity

Introduction: You may have seen them in bookshops: slim volumes that offer readers "101 uses for..." everything, from bridesmaids' dresses to old farm tractors. What I do know is that coming up with 101 uses for anything – live, dead, or inanimate – certainly reveals something about the creative mind of the author. It shows that it is capable of spontaneous flexibility.

Development: Distribute pens and paper, each participant should have a set. Explain to the participants that they should write down a list of different attributes, functions, meanings, whatever they feel and connect with the topic. The main idea is to free yourself from functional fixedness and to consider the different properties of the chosen topic. Each participant should pick one random topic. (Here you can give them randomly by cutting the topics and shuffling them.) Set 3 minutes (you can choose a 3-minute song, without lyrics) and once the song or the time runs out, they should stop writing.

End of the Activity: Invite some or all the participants to read their lists.

Extended version: Challenge the participants to take the list of words and create a story about the topic. Give them time and create an environment where they can be creative, e.g. by putting on music or choosing another place where they feel more comfortable writing.

Debriefing questions

- How surprised are you with the results?

- If you had more time, do you think you could go deeper into other meanings?

- What was your strategy to find creativity?

- How can you relate this exercise with daily life? How do you find solutions for daily struggles?

Innovation consists in finding new uses for knowledge we already have, or expressing knowledge in a new way. You can use this sentence to start deconstructing mental blocks.

Remarks

You can choose a list of important topics that are related with the aim of the day. (For example, if you work with inclusion, you can prepare different topics, such as friends, school, family, culture, language…)

Check the list and you can find important concepts to integrate in the group or to explain different meanings to a certain topic.

This activity can be used as an energizer to start the day or to conclude the day. You can use all the words for the participants to explain "how was the day for you" or "how would you like the day to be".

Type of method	Self-knowledge, relaxation, get connected with other people
Author	Inês Vasquez – Method used in YouthCoop context
Number of participants	Can be used as peer exercise or for a whole group (around 15 to 20 members)
Related competences	Creativity, self-expression, identification of needs, empathy and honest sharing
Objectives	Unleash the creativity that is inside each human; explore art as a communication tool to express inner topics; reinforce positive aspects of the self and to others; promote better understanding of others; reinforce active listening
Time / Duration	45 – 90 minutes
Space requirements	A calm environment. Can be done at tables or on the floor. Check if the floor is plain.

Materials	• Large sheets of paper, A3 or flipchart paper (smaller size is not recommended) • Watercolours or finger paint, sustainable to be used with hands

- Brushes, if you feel the group is not comfortable to use their hands

- Clean up material: napkins, water, wet tissues...

- Speaker and a nice playlist of instrumental relaxing songs

5. Prepare a debriefing session by taking a short break and inviting everyone to look at each other's works (like an exhibition walk). Invite the group to sit in a circle and speak up about their art piece.

Facilitation tip: If you have access to flipchart paper or other extra big paper sheets, invite the participants to draw their profile and use the heart area as the core of the drawing.

Description of the activity

1. Instructions to the group: Each participant will have one piece of paper. In the centre of the page they should create their personal symbol. The personal symbol must not occupy all the page, just the centre. It has to be painted or drawn in one single colour, which should represent the person, for example her/his favourite colour.

2. The participants have 15 to 20 minutes to create their personal symbol. The facilitator should ensure that the page has enough free space for the second part of the exercise.

3. Once the core (personal symbol) is ready, the participants should choose three to five different colours which should represent important aspects in their life. These colours must interact with the core of the page according to personal experience/importance. The participants have another 15 to 20 minutes to complete the art piece.

4. Inform the participants when the time runs out so that they can finish their art intervention.

Debriefing questions

Starting questions

What were your feelings when you created your personal symbol? What does that say about you? How did you relate with the other colours around your personal symbol?

Development questions

1. What did you learn about each other?

2. What are the contributions of the others to support your development?

3. Do you feel that you are more similar or different from each other? If different, how do you think you can use the difference to celebrate the group and work together?

4. Do you think your creation can be useful to express different aspects of yourself? Limits, values?

Remarks

- The results of these method can be displayed on the walls as a group profile and should be accessible to be transformed during the training/group sessions.

- If you have access to a Polaroid camera, an analogue camera or a normal mobile phone camera, you can take pictures of the participants with their drawing behind them as an "aura background" to have a nice symbolic reminder of the process. Let the participants write positive feedback behind the picture.

- This method is very personal. The facilitator should mediate the time of exchange. It is important to let the participants have their say and to emphasise the importance of knowing how to pass the word, so that everyone can participate.

- Try to list some signs of vulnerability so that you can pay attention that the method is not too invasive. After all it is only a method to facilitate getting to know each other and not to expose traumatic/overwhelming memories.

- Establish supportive relationships, where participants can give feedback and comments, for example by placing post-its on each other's creations.

- The choice of music is important. Use instrumental pieces and songs without lyrics, so that it doesn't interfere with the creative process. It is difficult to find neutral songs, but try to find relaxing music.

- In an international setting, this is a good exercise to promote getting to know each other and to integrate participants who are afraid to speak or to express themselves in public. The results can be used as a basis for interaction by encouraging curiosity in each other.

- Give participants the option to skip the exchange to avoid peer pressure.

- It is recommended that the group already knows each other a little or that there is mature interaction between the participants.

- If there is a group of facilitators, they should know the limits of this method. We are not therapists and should respect the limits to which the participants are willing to share.

CONCLUSION

Defining the meaning of well-being is a constant journey. It requires knowing the external and internal factors, so that each one can relate to the best that is in them. Like any journey, there are ups and downs. There are moments with more and others with fewer resources. The team that wrote this booklet hopes that all youth leaders can find some useful advice for difficult moments. For young people, everyone who goes through their lives is a promoter of well-being. Today's challenges will encourage the development of new ways of looking at the world and at ourselves. Knowing how to manage emotions and mental states, especially less positive ones, is a valuable lesson for healthier lives, more resilient communities and young people who are better prepared to deal with the complexity of the world.

However, other questions appear on the horizon: What was the positive side of living in such an uncertain and vulnerable time during the COVID pandemic? Certainly, this time has produced positive phenomena, such as the acceleration of learning skills, engagement in creative interests and awareness of using time wisely. And there is also a focus on wellbeing in self-relationship. Who was particularly active during this time? What can we learn from these experiences? The digital world played an important role in this. It made it possible to explore new activities, to focus on Do-it-Yourself (DIY) and Do-it-Together (DIT), to bring communities and people together, to learn about the role of new technologies in society and to build a healthy relationship with the digital world. Youth work has also developed new dimensions in working with young people and responding to the challenges of inclusion in the digital environment. We invite all those interested to expand their curiosity and add more topics to those in this booklet, so that the work becomes more complete and we can all serve better!

FIND YOUR LOCAL HELPLINE

Throughout Europe, telephone counselling services for children and adolescents are being developed and networked under a single number in cooperation with Child Helpline International (CHI).

Youngsters can call anonymously the following number:
▶ **116 111**

This number is available in the following countries and is managed by local organisations: Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

There is a different telephone number in the following countries: ▶ **Armenia: 0800 61 111** ▶ **Austria: 147**
▶ **Bosnia & Herzegovina: 080 05 03 05** ▶ **France: 119**
▶ **Iceland: 1717** ▶ **Italy: 1 96 96** ▶ **Liechtenstein: 147**
▶ **North Macedonia: +389 70 390 632** ▶ **Switzerland: 147**
▶ **Türkiye: 0850 455 00 70**

USEFUL LINKS

We have collected links to useful resources. Go to **https://generationeurope.org/booklets** or scan the following QR code:

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ABOUT GENERATION EUROPE - THE ACADEMY

Generation Europe – The Academy is an international network of youth work organisations and a funding programme for European cooperation. We want social participation for all. Young people raise their voices and take action: in their local communities and across all boundaries. Together, we are contributing to an active and inclusive European citizenship.

The young people of our network form local groups and connect at international youth encounters. Together, we create opportunities for participation on local and European level, regardless of origin, parents' income and previous success in the formal education system. In each of our project partnerships, youth from three countries work together. They identify local problems and support each other to address them.

Abbreviations

IBB e.V.

Internationales Bildungs– und Begegnungsewerk e.V. / International Association for Education and Exchange. IBB e.V. is the coordinating association of Generation Europe – The Academy.

GenE–A

Generation Europe – The Academy

GLOSSARY

Local Group: A group of young people organised at a local partner organisation in the network of Generation Europe – The Academy.

Partnership: International group consisting of three local partner organisations, that signed a partnership agreement, and their local groups.

Project manager: A person who is responsible for the general management of the matters concerning Generation Europe – The Academy at the local partner organisation: planning, implementation, accounting and reporting. He*she has decision making competences in his*her organisation.

Youth leader: A professional working in the field of non-formal education, that takes responsibility for the local group and/or the youth encounter.

Ambassadors: Former participants of international youth encounters, that are very active and interested. They are trained to take responsibilities on all levels of Generation Europe – The Academy. They become mentors in their local groups, a link between the youth leaders and the local youth, and also important advocates for the needs of young people in Europe.

Participants: Young people who are taking part in the local group and/or in the youth encounter. (In some cases the local group is really big and only parts of the local group will also join the youth encounter.)

Activity: Umbrella term for workshops, excursions, games, informal moments, free time activities and so on.

Method: Pedagogical concept of an activity, that also defines its aim. It also has different parts like introduction, implementation, reflection.

Method Sheet: The form where all the information needed for carrying out an activity is explained.

Facilitator: A person that has different roles/tasks at an event or activity, like moderating, presenting, visualising. A facilitator can also be a project manager, youth leader, ambassador, participant or an invited expert.

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